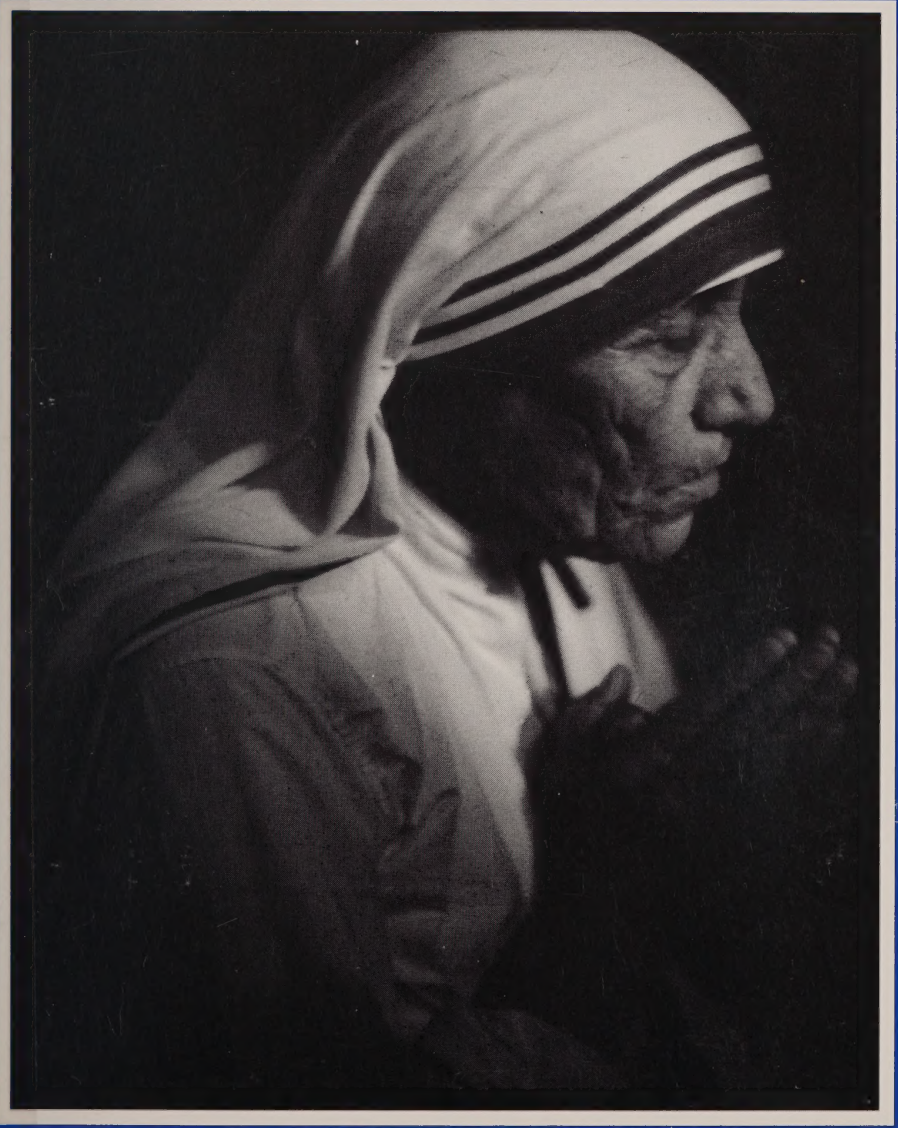


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SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ DECEMBER 1997

SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit

of unity among humankind.

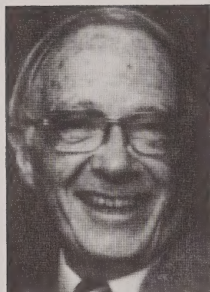
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Cover photo by: Michael Christensen

FROM THE P R E S I D E N T



As I write, the year is fast drawing to a close. It gets dark early now, and as the light fades I turn to feast my eyes once again on the glorious scarlet robe of leaves worn by the sugar maple outside my window.

This lovely annual transformation delights me and reminds me that the holiday season is not far off. And as usual, after all these years, I haven't a clue as to what to give my wife, daughter, relatives, and friends for Christmas. What would they like or need the most that I have the ability to give them?

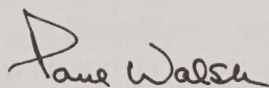
Part of my problem is a growing reluctance to throw away money on presents that are not really needed or wanted and mostly end up forgotten in some basement or bureau drawer. Wouldn't it be great, I thought, if we could be like the maple tree and give everyone a beautiful gift that grew naturally out of who we are, out of our very nature as human beings?

The wonderful truth is that we all possess, as a rightful inheritance, a rich treasure chest overflowing with just such a gift. It's perhaps the most valuable gift in the world, and it's yours to give away freely to everyone you meet: beloveds, strangers, even those (we think) we don't like. It will make them very happy. It will make *you* very happy.

Sadly, that priceless treasure is hidden from us much of the time by a fog of ego-driven desires and fears. But there are ways to find and liberate that joyous and empowering energy. They are called prayer, meditation, and service, and

together they guide you along the sacred journey that leads to the hidden treasure of loving kindness--the greatest gift of all.

Now comes perhaps the hardest part of the journey. You must concentrate on thinking of your best friend--the one who is closest to you in this world, the one who most deserves your love and affection. You must look deeply into *yourself* with love and kindness and compassion, remembering that God loves and accepts you *just as you are*--wherever you are on your journey. That heart-knowledge can transform you into the kind of loving, non-judgemental, compassionate person you want, and have it in you, to be--"into the likeness of Christ" as Paul says in 2 Corinthians. Only when you realize and practice that truth about yourself can you freely offer all others the most precious gift of all--the gift of loving kindness.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Paul Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Paul" is written with a large, stylized 'P' that loops around the first few letters. The last name "Walsh" is written in a more straightforward cursive script.

Paul Walsh

FROM THE EDITOR



I count myself lucky to have once looked into Mother Teresa's eyes. In a church courtyard in San Francisco, many well-wishers gathered after a group of young Missionaries of Charity professed their final vows. As the crush of people waned, I stepped up. This tiny, sari-draped woman reached up, framed my face with her hands, and for a moment she gazed at me then blessed me. As cliché as it sounds, for that fleeting moment, I felt as if I were the only creature in the whole world. Mother Teresa's powerful presence of love mesmerized me and countless others around the world.

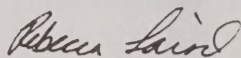
A few years later I traveled to Calcutta and volunteered with the Missionaries of Charity. At the home for the dying near the Kaligat temple, I hung freshly washed sheets to dry on the rooftop and clipped a woman's toenails as we communicated with clumsy hand signals. At one of Mother Teresa's orphanages I was instructed to play with the babies. A little boy's sad face captivated me. His dark eyes were fearful and his stick-thin arms hung listlessly by his side. He was infant-sized, but his full set of teeth belied his older age. He clung to me like a scrawny, wounded bird. One of the Indian attendants called him "the Moslem child" and revealed that he had been left by his stricken parents the day before because they couldn't feed him. The wan, half-smile he finally

gave me at day's end was the priceless reward for my simple labors.

Offering simple love and care was Mother Teresa's mandate. She preached with her life and many heeded her message. In this issue, we honor Mother Teresa for her decades of loving service through profiling her work in "Pilgrimage" by Michael Christensen. In an interview Robert Corin Morris addresses the question: What is it that we modern seekers and pilgrims long for most? In a holiday feature Deborah Smith Douglas tells us that "angels are creature of pure spirit" who are available to us. During the most hectic season, Emilie Griffin gives advice in "Twelve Ways to Slow Down a Busy Life." Since many travel during December, we've included Anita Wheatcroft's story of God's quiet, urgent nudging to talk to a perfect stranger during an airport layover in this month's "A Transforming Experience." In "The Ways of Prayer," John Barber goes on retreat and learns to pray with his imagination. In exuberant fashion minister Howard Hanger and poet Patricia G. Rourke exhort us to incarnate joy in everyday life.

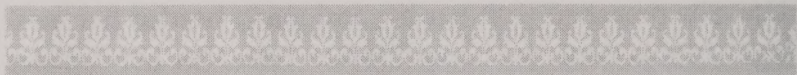
We offer these gifts of words and images to you this season. They speak of the presence of love in the world, and that's what we pray reaches you.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Rebecca Laird".

Rebecca Laird

PILGRIMAGE



Written On Your Fingers

Michael Christensen

I was not prepared for India. Calcutta is, I think, one of the most wretched cities in the world. For nine days I walked the streets in shock as I witnessed how teeming masses of people struggle to survive. As I volunteered in Mother Teresa's homes, the daily contact with the poor of Calcutta caused me initial discomfort. I was not as compassionate as I fancied myself, not as at peace with myself and others as I had believed. In fact, I had strong impulses to flee the presence of the poor, to "freak out" when asked to feed breakfast to a line-up of hungry babies, to become immobilized when requested to help a nurse insert a needle into the arm of an emaciated woman who soon died.

Each morning before working in the homes, I attended mass with the 296 sisters and other co-workers at 5:45am in the Mother House on Lower Circular Road. After mass one morning, I confessed to Mother Teresa how I felt about working in her homes. "Did you see Jesus?" she asked me. I could not say a truthful yes because all I saw was suffering, disease, and death. I was simply trying to find the courage to expose myself to

Michael Christensen is the Director of the Doctor of Ministry program at the Theological School of Drew University. He is the co-author of Children of Chernobyl: Raising Hope from the Ashes, and author of The Samaritan's Imperative: A Call to Compassion for People Living with AIDS. This story is excerpted from City Streets, City People with the author's permission.

subhuman conditions and cope with my emotional shock.

Mother Teresa tried to help me see it from her perspective: "When we love the poor," she said, "we do not first see the poor; we first see Jesus! We are not social workers but missionaries of Christ's love. We do it for Jesus! It is His face we see in the faces of the poorest of the poor."

As we sat on a bench outside the chapel, Mother Teresa took my hand in hers and said, "The gospel is written on your fingers." She slowly pointed to each of my five fingers and said, carefully emphasizing each word, "You-did-it-to-me."

She brought my five fingers together and said, "See the five wounds of Jesus?" I thought about the two wounds in his hands, the two in his feet, and the one wound in his side as he was crucified. Putting my



Michael Christensen in a Calcutta orphanage.

pointed fingers into the palm of her hand, she said softly: "This is his love for you."

"Now close your fist," she said. "This is the sacred heart of Jesus that says to us: 'When I was hungry, you gave me to eat; when I was thirsty you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me.'

"And at the end of life," she added, "your five fingers will excuse you or accuse you of doing it unto the least of these. 'You-did-it-to-me.'"

I was overcome by the simple truth of the gospel from the mouth of Mother Teresa. "By their fruits you will know them," she was saying. But the truth hit home deeper than that. I was in the presence of someone who practices personal poverty, and I was being broken in the process of sensing the humble spirit of Mother Teresa. Perhaps for the first time, I prayed for a "broken and contrite heart" that recognized its own spiritual poverty: "Hear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy" [Psalm 86:1]. What I experienced in the days that followed was a breakthrough in coming to know and love God's poor wherever they are found, and in learning to understand on a deep level how much I, too, am truly loved.

A LIGHT IN MY HEART

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Robert Corin Morris

Nearly seventeen years ago, Robert Corin Morris left his position as Minister of Christian Education at Grace Episcopal Church in Summit, New Jersey, to found Interweave Center for Wholistic Living. Today, hundreds of people from varied walks of life and religious perspectives regularly participate in Interweave's activities that range from "Walking the Labyrinth" to "Six Seconds to Calmness." I recently spent the afternoon talking with this wise educator of the soul.

Sacred Journey: Describe the work of Interweave and the impetus that gave rise to it.

Robert Corin Morris: Interweave is a community learning center that exists to offer people practical strategies to approach wellness spirituality and enhance the common good. We bring together the resources that are mobilizing in the culture—the entire panoply of resources that come from a revival of traditional spiritual practices, from mind/body medical research, from the last decades of practical psychological work, and from group dynamics, organizational development, and systems theories that help us understand how people interact in relationships and groups.

We began in 1981, originally as an experiment in a local

Robert Corin Morris



Christian church's adult education program. Very quickly we became free-standing. A local congregation houses, hosts, and welcomes us as an interreligious organization that serves the entire community.

Who attends Interweave's courses?

Most of those who attend our courses are in midlife. We serve a lot of women, fewer men. Most people who attend have a keen interest in a specific issue: relationship and family issues, health issues, or a particular spiritual practice or tradition. We offer practical resources of stress management, meditation, ways to cope with difficult people, and how to think of creative ways to address social problems, but behind all that we discover again and again that people come to Interweave to figure out what to focus on next in their lives. You might call this values clarification; it's what I call lifestyle clarification.

We live in a very disempowering social context that makes people feel helpless. We live in a culture that honors the cult of expertise that makes people sense if they don't have a PhD in something, they can't do anything. People end up feeling like they don't know how to do fundamental life tasks. We are trying to help people find very basic and perennial ways they can help make themselves more healthy, improve their relationships with other people, find meaning and purpose for the next phase of their lives, and how they can relate spiritually to life.

Houston Smith's books on religion and spirituality helped coin the phrase, "the wisdom traditions." These traditions offer practical savvy and skill for living your life. We think that certain aspects of modern medicine, psychology, alternative therapy, and a revival of traditional spiritual practice can help us form a sense of wisdom—life wisdom for our culture that

resonates with the wisdom traditions of other cultures. We are not traditionalists; we are perennialists. We ask: What are the values that endure, and how can we express them in our situation?

My Christian roots are very deep, but when I was younger and first learning a great deal about Judaism and Buddhism, I entertained the possibility that I might need to come at things from another perspective. I was tempted to adopt another pathway, but my roots are deep enough that was never really genuinely possible, and I'm very happy for that. I think that people are looking for sympathetic ways to understand and use things from other cultures that have somehow gotten lost or are missing from our culture. For me as a Christian, learning about Jewish and Buddhist spiritual practice, by seeing how they relate to the remarkable mind/body research on what is good for us, has in the end only jumpstarted elements of Christianity that I either didn't know about or had forgotten about. I am more deeply Christian than I ever have been in my life, and much more ready simply to be a part of the conversation in our culture, to make my contribution out of Christian wisdom as to what is good for human beings. And I want to hear from other people's living traditions of how human beings can live richer, fuller lives.

There are ways to live better. Without being simplistic we try to say: *Look, there are some things that can make a difference in your life.* You are on journey, so take a step, then take another step and so on. A lot of people have used us for two or three years to get themselves equipped to take off on another direction—to go back to graduate school, to change careers, to deal with family issues in a different way, to deal with a health crisis, and to deal with dying. One of the satisfactions in this work is to watch people who have been connected with Interweave for many years deal with their dying parents. To see people walk with their relatives or friends the whole way

and have significantly different experiences than they otherwise would have had is so rewarding. People come and tell me of the intensification of soul they have witnessed. The notion of death as some kind of rebirth becomes a living experience for these people. For many this is not a belief they carried in to the experience, but something they come away from as modern people shaking their heads and saying: *I have watched a rebirth.*

What is it that contemporary seekers and pilgrims long for most? Do you hear some consistent cries and longings from those with whom you work?

The people who come to us are asking for two things: perspective and something practical to do that will make a positive difference in their lives. People come to their first courses at Interweave saying things like: *"I want to learn how to deal with stress."* *"I'm facing a health challenge, and I want to experience the holistic alternatives to deal with it."* *"I don't know what I want to do with the rest of my life."* *"I've heard that T'ai Chi is good for your health."* *"I don't know anything about the Bible, and I've always been afraid of it. This seems like a safe place to learn without being hit over the head."* *"I'm a cradle Catholic, but I've always had an interest in Buddhism and the chance to study it in relationship to Christianity and other religions is exactly what I am looking for."*

There is so much information in our society that we are all suffering from information overload—it's one of the disempowering things we face. Interweave sifts information and tries to present a balanced account. We take the soundest methods we know, and offer them as paradigms. For instance, we will teach a fundamental approach to meditation, and while it doesn't bind you to our way of meditating, it introduces you to the elements involved. It gives you an experi-

ence of it, then you can go and find more resources that help you develop the areas you are working on.

I noticed that one of Interweave's groups views and discusses recent movies. What role can various media play in the spiritual quest?

We want to help people to learn how to read the various aspects of their lives as sacred text. We are training people to read and use anything they encounter as text. In a mind/body medicine sense, we encourage people to learn to listen to their bodies and respond to what they hear as text. In the personal meaning courses we help people to reflect upon their lives, their feelings, and their dreams as sacred text.

I think the same is true about media and the culture at large. What is the meaning of Princess Diana's funeral as text, as icon, as a drama? Why did Mother Teresa's death move us? Particular books and movies offer only less dramatic moments of the same kind. Events like these become dialogues with our souls and our values.

For anyone on an intentional spiritual journey the ability to stop indulging on media and to start using it as sacred text is very important. We can step back and reflect: What are the movies and dramas and books that grab me? What do they tell me about things that need to be expressed in me? What do the movies or media that I don't like tell me about my moral values? Paying attention to how media moves us can become a very enriching experience.

What particular spiritual practices do you suggest as ways of deepening our sense of the sacred during this hectic holiday season?

What we are dealing with in both Hanukkah and Christ-

mas, and this is more true with Christmas, is that the holiday undoes the festival. I urge people to make sure that the center of the celebration is your own home and personal spiritual practices. For example, many Christians use the advent wreath and light candles for four weeks before Christmas. Place the wreath on the dinner table and light the candles and sing a verse of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," a couple of times a week. This will help keep the central focus during the season. In celebrating Hanukkah you do the same. You don't rush through the ceremony but intentionally make the lighting of the candles a time of quiet or, if you have small kids, add some singing.

Similarly you take the things you have to do and make them spiritual practice. If you are going to decorate a Christmas tree, don't make a job of it; make it a ritual. For me, I buy the tree, bring it into the house, and in this ecological age my wife and I recognize that this tree is literally giving its life for this sacred celebration. In the holiest sense, it is a sacrifice, just like the animal sacrifices of ancient religions. If you use a live tree, instead of a cut one, spend some time being with the tree, to smell it, to touch it, to enjoy it, to appreciate it. And then, so far as you can, when you put on the ornaments, play some nice music, and take some time with family and friends. Have a prayer. If you are embarrassed to pray aloud before friends, have some silence. Find ways to appreciate your friends, the ornaments, what they represent about your lives, and what the season means.

Also in celebrating Christmas it helps to remember that a traditional Christmas is twelve days long. Save a few gifts for surprise gifts—maybe they're the ones you didn't have time to wrap. Take what you have to do and make it into a much more intentional celebration—into a ritual. Ritual is taking what we ordinarily have to do and recognizing the preciousness and sacredness of it.

We can also become more intentional about what we are giving and cut down on the amount of gifts. Give small tokens or useable things—a bottle of wine, some homemade food, a little book, a card that takes a full five minutes to write. Less is more when it comes to the holidays.

Would you share a story with us from your own life that shows how the divine broke through in a way that reached you?

For much of my life, Christmas celebrations were too pat and too pretty. It didn't seem to square with the difficulties of my life. I was raised in a form of Christianity that promised a solution to all of my problems, and I discovered that God doesn't work that way. God may not solve all my problems but God is genuinely a resource in the midst of them.

I have a lifelong dance with depression. I am biochemically pre-programmed to get depressed. It's one of the things that God didn't fix. Therefore the image of light and dark are for me terribly important.

There's a wonderful recording of the King's College Chapel Christmas Eve Service that features a medieval song about Jesus being my dark soul's light. During many Christmases I would listen to Christmas carols and cry. The love that seemed to be promised wasn't available. It wasn't that I didn't have loving people in my life, it's that I was looking for something so ideal.

There came a point when I had truly, on faith, given up my expectations for this wonderful, unconditional, cosmic love that was supposed to be available, especially if you are saved. I was truly eating and drinking of what life offered me and was appreciative of the love that was really there from my wife and others. But I still had to deal with that child-ache of wanting more. Then something happened that really

is a miracle to me.

For many years I would make a light in my heart while in meditation. I did variations on this, too. I would go and sit in the sunlight and imagine myself surrounded by sunlight. Research now shows that this gets your endorphins going. Yet there came a moment when I had exhausted all my ways of dealing with depression. I did not know what to do. I gave up trying to figure it out. I let it go and said, *Okay God I'm open to your ideas*. And I went off on a self-constructed three day retreat. I got in my car, spent the first night in a motel, the second night in the Tibetan monastery in Washington, New Jersey, and the third night at the Convent of St. John the Baptist. And in between stops I visited my holy places in nature. I wasn't trying to solve my problem, I was trying to open myself. And as I sat in the Buddhist monastery saying my Christian prayers, I made the image of light in my heart as an image of God's love. The only way I can describe what happened is to say that it stopped being an image. Something asserted itself through that image as if it were love. A bulb turned on, and I knew that I was not imagining this or making it happen. The light lasted for a few minutes, and I felt a little better.

Then in the next two months the wounded place in me got kicked up again, and I began to fall into another depression. I started in on the management routine I always turned to when I started getting depressed, and unbidden, unsought that same, very distinctive, almost palpable light came into my heart. The light came and got me. And I knew it had come to bring me out, and I knew it wasn't me. I knew it was the Light. As a Christian, this light was the Good Shepherd come to find the lost sheep. I've never had that experience again. But I know it is there. And that next Christmas when I listened to 'O Jesus, thou my dark soul's light,' my soul was no longer dark.

ANGELS



Deborah Smith Douglas



I saw a bumper sticker the other day that really bothered me: "ANGELS!! DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT THEM!!!" Are angels simply a kind of heavenly American Express account: time saving, security-enhancing, the ultimate travel accessory?

Ten years ago, when I first began to study the subject of angels, the whole idea was considered arcane, even bizarre. These days, though, angels are a major marketing phenomenon. Bookstores have whole sections devoted to bestselling angel books and tapes; gift stores abound with cute angel stuff, from greeting cards and candles to charms. I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that angels have a home page on the World Wide Web.

This would be great news if the surge in interest in angels-as-commodity equalled interest in angels-as-divine-reality. But it doesn't. We have gone from not believing in angels, to believing in them in a silly, indulgent way, as if they were kin to the tooth fairy.

Deborah Smith Douglas, whose writings have appeared in Commonweal, Spiritual Life, and Weavings, lives in joyful hope of angelic presence.

Now this is a shame. It impoverishes our lives--without, however, probably making much difference to the angels. As the poet Francis Thompson once observed, "The angels keep their ancient places: Turn but a stone and start a wing. Tis you, tis your estranged faces that miss the many-splendor'd thing."

Our faces, here at the end of the millennium, are "estranged" for many different reasons. Bad theology, particularly of the puritan variety that strips all that is beautiful and imaginative from religion, can write angels out of the salvation script. Bad art, that insists on portraying angels as fat naked babies with useless wings, can deny the awesome power that scripture ascribes to angelic visitation. Post-Enlightenment rationalism that demands that all human experience be empirically demonstrable leaves hardly a leg for real angels to stand on (even on the head of a pin).

But silly art, theology, and bumper stickers by themselves wouldn't be enough to rob us of God's angels if our experience confirmed the possibility. There is an old Jewish legend that says God blinds us, in mercy, to the presence of angels because we would go mad with fear if we could see them.

That may well be so. But I suspect that sometimes angels long to be perceived, and that it is not God's mercy but our myopia that keeps us blind to the angels among us.

It is worth taking the trouble to un-estrangle our faces, and catch a glimpse of a many-splendored thing.

Traditional Christianity, like traditional Judaism and Islam, has always affirmed the reality of angels. Important people like Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin took angels very seriously indeed. (Which is something we can be sure that angels themselves never do: I think it was G.K. Chesterton who observed that "angels can fly because they take themselves so lightly.")

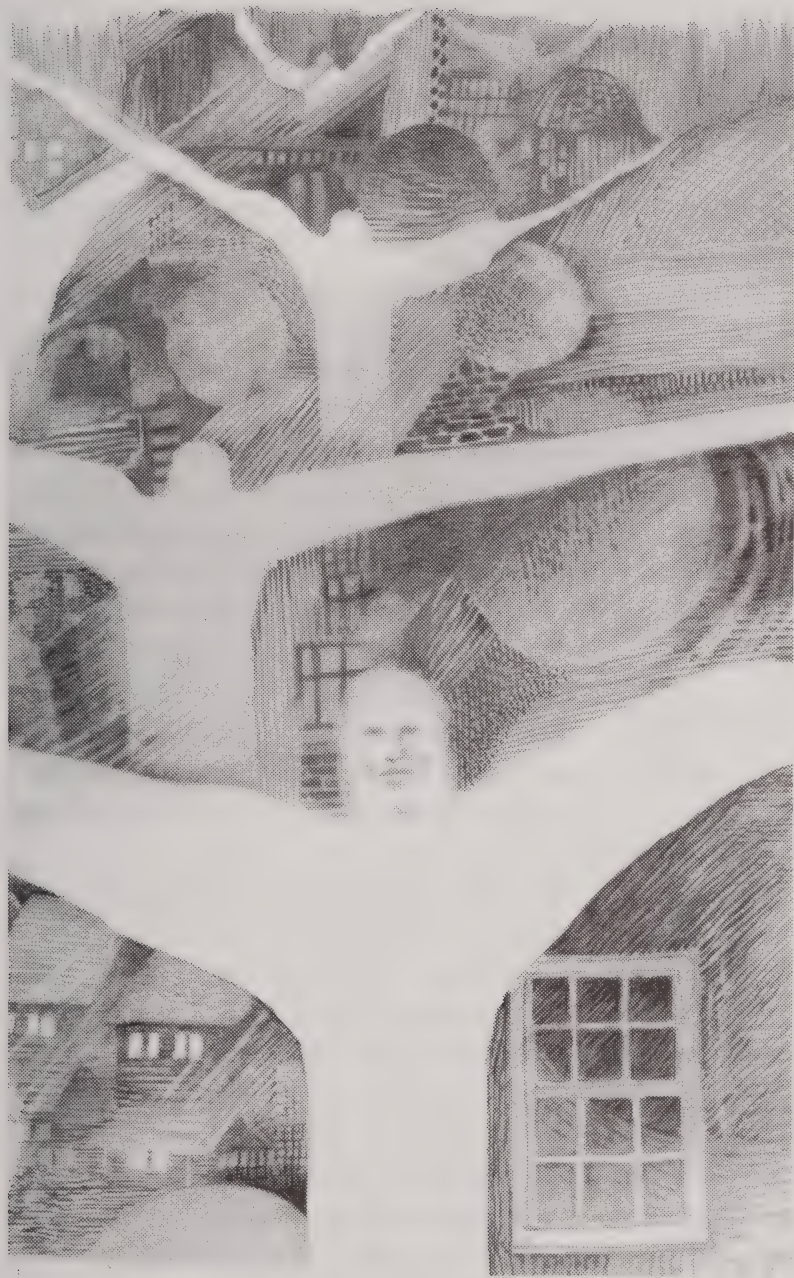
More importantly, of course, the Bible itself is brimful of

angels. And while the scriptures' witness is short on physical description, it is pretty clear that, whatever they looked like, the angels that appeared to Jacob, Mary, Bethlehem's shepherds, and Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb, were not fat naked babies with fairy wings. It doesn't seem that there was anything remotely cute about them, since practically the first thing they ever say to anyone is "Don't be afraid." (Madeline L'Engle's description of a cherubim in *A Wind in the Door* is much more biblical than most familiar portrayals; the cherubim in that book is so awesome a creation of fire and smoke and eyes and wings that at first the children think it is a drove of dragons.)

The common denominator of the scriptural witness for angels seems to be that angels are creatures of pure spirit whose home is Heaven, where they forever surround the throne of God, but who are sometimes sent out on missions to the earth to manifest God's presence or announce God's plans. They are by nature essentially bodiless, but sometimes assume a bodily form in order to appear to human beings.

There is strong biblical witness for guardian angels as well as messenger angels--as in Matthew 18:10, where Jesus, speaking of children, declares that "in Heaven their angels always behold the face of God."

One of my favorite stories about guardian angels is the one in Daniel 3 about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three faithful Jews who, refusing to worship the idols established by King Nebuchadnezzar, were bound up and thrown into a fiery furnace for their treason. The blast from the open door of the furnace was so great that it killed the soldiers who threw the prisoners in. The king watched all this, and then "stood up astounded" and asked his councilors, "Didn't we just throw three men into the midst of the fire?" They answered, "Certainly, O King." "But look! I see four men walking about in the midst of the fire without harm. And the



Descent of Angels

appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

When the king ran to open the furnace and call Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out, they emerged so unscathed by the fire that their clothes didn’t even smell like smoke. And they emerged alone. The angel was gone, but the angel had been there when it counted, walking with them in the heart of the terrible fire.

There is also the wonderful cautionary folk tale of Balaam’s ass, recorded in Numbers 22.

Balaak, the king of Moab, asked Balaam to come and curse the Israelites; Balaam went with the King’s messengers, despite God’s warning that he should not go. So God became angry, and sent an angel with a sword to stand in his way.

*The morning
air is all
awash with
angels*

Balaam’s trusty donkey three times saw the angel, and three times stopped in his tracks, but Balaam (presumably because he was too preoccupied with the King’s flattery) did not see the angel and beat the donkey for stopping. Then the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes and Balaam saw the angel (whose first words, by the way, were to berate him for

beating his donkey).

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews urges us “not to neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” So the bible suggests that our sense of our own importance can blind us to angels, but that courageous witness (like that of Shadrach and company), and humility (like that of Balaam’s ass), as well as hospitality to strangers, can open our eyes to the angels present with us.

According to the scriptural witness, our guardian angels promote our good, strengthen and protect us, and walk with us in the fiery furnaces of our lives. Of course, since they are pure spirit, there is a limit to how much they can fight our battles for us, since our soul-struggles tend to be all tangled

up in physical and material nets. We must be careful not to abdicate too much responsibility to the promise of angelic aid: there are some things we must do, and refrain from doing, by ourselves.

But there is real help available to us, every moment of every day, to resist temptation, to keep our tempers, to remember our promises. When we are dying, the African-American spiritual promises us, God sends whole “bands of angels” to carry us home.

If we can teach our hearts to see, we may discover that angels are with us--not as the ultimate travel accessory, not as a kind of divine credit card, but as messengers and vehicles of grace. We may come to see them, as Balaam’s donkey did, standing right in front of us, barring the way to the disaster we are intent on pursuing--or as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did, walking at our sides in the midst of danger.

Even if we don’t see them, we can trust their invisible presence: trust that, as the poet Richard Wilbur put it, “outside the open window, the morning air is all awash with angels.”

I L L U M I N A T I O N S

Ask and receive
Seek and find
Knock and the door opens wide before you

Set an example for all the world to see

The Kingdom of God comes not at some future time
You cannot point out the signs of its coming
The Kingdom of God comes not at some special site
You cannot point out the place of its coming
The Kingdom of God is already here, among you, now

Purity and impurity
is not what goes into the mouth
Purity and impurity
is what comes out

These sayings of Jesus are translations by John Dominic Crossan, Chair of the Historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature and professor emeritus of religious studies at DePaul University. They are excerpted from The Essential Jesus: What Jesus Really Taught. Copyright ©1994. Published by HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

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Forgive the debt owed by another
As God forgives that owed by you

Love your enemy

What you hear in darkness
 speak in daylight
What you hear from whispers
 shout from rooftops

You buried your heart where you hid your treasure

Split the wood
 I am beside you
Lift the stone
 I am among you

SPIRITUALITY & EVERYDAY LIFE



Twelve Ways to Slow Down a Busy Life

Emilie Griffin

One

Deliberately honor your day of rest--whether Sunday or Saturday or Friday--as a specifically religious act. Do not reproach yourself for not having done this before; but make a fresh start with some particular gesture, like having fresh flowers in the house or listening to music.

Two

Play a game with a child. If no child can be found, play a child's game. Let this activity become for you a way of slowing down or letting go of the intense adult responsibilities you feel for the past, the future, and the present. Let God take charge of the universe while you play.

Three

Visit the botanical gardens or a nearby nature trail. In your walk, be contemplative. If you don't know how to be contemplative, be what "contemplative" means to you. Avoid

Emilie Griffin is author of Clinging: The Experience of Prayer and Wilderness Time: A Guide for Spiritual Retreat. This excerpt is from The Reflective Executive by Emilie Griffin, copyright ©1993. Used with permission of the Crossroad Publishing Company.

making a production of it or sharpening your contemplative style. Instead, be a clumsy, not fully competent, awkward contemplative. Relax and let God do the work.

Four

In contemplating flowers, trees, or birds, try to change places imaginatively with the trees, birds, or flowers. Enjoy your role as subject to the King of the Universe. Stretch, expand, unfurl, and experience contentment; be at peace.

Five

Visit an older person, or invite that person to visit you. Slow down in order to keep pace with that person's way of life. Allow silences to fall in natural places when they do.

Six

Consciously allow stresses to drain away until you feel empty in the good sense of the word. Try avoiding the electronic, the mechanized, and whatever is high-speed. Walk rather than ride. Read in preference to watching television. Take time to read the Sunday paper all the way through to the point of total boredom.

Seven

Write a letter, by hand, or send a card to someone who has not heard from you in a long time and would welcome knowing how you are.

Eight

Listen to recorded music, classical or modern, but as you would at a concert, without attempting to do something else at the same time. Be fully attentive to the music; let it become for you an experience of God.

Nine

Read one or more favorite Bible passages aloud, alone or in a group. Don't work at the meanings and interpretations. Just let the experience flow.

Ten

If you are in the habit of taking office work home on the weekend, make a deliberate break with the practice for one weekend only. Promise yourself (without making any permanent change) that at the end of the weekend, you will evaluate the differences and consider changing your Sabbath practice long-term. In all these leisure activities, lean against the impulse to do something, to score, to achieve. Concentrate instead on appreciation, gratitude, praise, and thankfulness for what God has already given to us.

Eleven

In a high-stress agenda, the days often flow together in a mindless stream. Lean against this. Stay in touch with the earth's turning and be conscious of the uniqueness of each day. Get up before dawn and watch the light slowly increase, or deliberately stay in touch with the twilight. Morning and evening prayer are good disciplines here.

Twelve

What would be required, in your relentless business agenda, to leave one day entirely free for God? Follow the example of Thomas More and Walker Percy by creating a day of solitude, a space that is empty for the possibility of grace. Take Walker Percy's metaphor of the human predicament as that of a castaway. Follow out his creative insight that you are the one who can send "a message in the bottle," a message of deliverance and hope. Who are you? What is the Lord ask-

ing of you? Is it perhaps merely to accept this sinful world as it is and not as you would have it? Is it possible that you must set a higher value on the distance you have crossed in the sands of existence up to now?



Linda D. Baumann

Copies of The Reflective Executive are available by writing to: Emilie Griffin, 635 Gravier Street, Suite 1138, New Orleans, LA 07130. You may enclose a check or money order for \$18, plus \$2 for postage and handling.

A T R A N S F O R M I N G E X P E R I E N C E

Airport Guidance

Anita Wheatcroft



San Antonio

"Flight 930--San Antonio to Tampa. Sorry, that plane will be late--delayed in St. Louis. Mechanical trouble." Memory brings it all back to me.

My husband, Dick, and I exchanged rueful glances, regretting the wasted time, having left our daughter's young family after what seemed too short a stay.

I pull out my book to pass the time.

Encounter With A Stranger

Suddenly I am aware of two elderly priests, who join us in the waiting area. The younger, dour-faced, reads from a black-covered prayer book. The other, white-haired, rotund, and smiling, reminds me, in his good nature, of my father who joked and smiled even in his recent final illness, and I miss him. This priest obviously has plans to enjoy his mystery novel during our forced wait.

A published author and frequent contributor to this journal, Anita Wheatcroft lives in The Woodlands, Texas.

"Speak to him!" The inner Voice is clear to me, though no one spoke. Again the Voice prods, "Speak to him!"

Obedying blindly, I hear myself. "Father, have you read this book?" I ask, pointing to the book on divine guidance I am reading.

"No." He acknowledges warmly that he admires the author and has meant to read it. Confidingly he admits, with a grin, that he prefers lighter adventure reading on vacation. We begin to talk as travelers do: of each other's destination, our present flights. Hearing we're from Houston, he expounds about our city's golf courses and wooded parks, then suddenly speaks of fishing trips in his native Midwest. Encouraging his talk, I hear of persons he has known and cared for in his long life.

When our conversation stalls and seems to close, we return to our books and I ask myself, "Why, Lord? Is that all you wanted?" It is not my habit to initiate conversation with strangers. Yet again I hear the Voice, this time more insistent. "Keep him talking. Listen to him." So I begin again, purposely opening deeper subjects.

Sacred Interlude

During that second half-hour we talk of his life's work, his faith, even prayer--the most deeply personal subject of all. He tells of parishes he's served--amusing incidents here, events of meaning there. He also tells of serving as army chaplain in World War II, mentioning in passing that he was decorated for bravery, "though I didn't deserve it. Just doing what needed to be done." He explains with enthusiasm that he lives in semi-retirement in a religious house in the downtown area of New Orleans. "My bishop, bless him, wants us old guys to feel useful," he confides with a laugh, "so my duties at St. Damian's are hearing confession, conducting Mass, and generally helping out--pastoral counseling there

at the old folks' home, and anywhere else." He pauses, spreads out his large hands as though sifting it all through widespread fingers, then looks up decidedly. "It's *important* work, you know, big or small, whatever any of us do, it's for God and God's family."

St. Damian's apparently is a sort of High Church Salvation Army outpost with a soup kitchen. People who have nowhere else to go stay overnight or several days, and then drift on. He recounts brief stories of amazing courage they've shown him, obstacles overcome by faith. Apparently he's had some heartbreaks as well as some victories. Who knows how many lives he's touched and changed? I wonder.

He says of his vocation, "Our priestly life is just one form of the Christian life, you know. These many vocations need not cut us off from the outside world and its problems. Instead it frees us--this commitment, I mean, makes our own lives quite simple. There's more time. More prayer time. People come to me whose lives are complicated, mixed up--full of strain and rush to get ahead--without meaning. I try to make Christ's love real for them too. That's what it's all about, isn't it?" Then he shakes his head, looking off, reflecting. "Poor, wonderful, troubled creatures. Children, grown-up children, aren't they? Just don't know how valuable, how unique, they are. Wanting to get on the right track again but now knowing how to start. And all the time there is Christ--Christ so near to each of us. Available! Waiting to help us. To give us all the love and joy we need.

"Sometimes we help with our church, our hostel, job training, soup kitchen, or a job. Maybe we just try to give them a little peace. Bad days? Sure! And disappointments, heartaches. Sure! Always, though, you know the good Lord is there. He pulls me up and into it again." His face glows with joy. "A real marvel, isn't it?"

Arrival and Departure

Our plane roars in and in the hurried confusion of gathering hand luggage and boarding the plane, somehow I lose sight of my priest friend in the crowd.

"Who was he?" my husband asks, elbowing me along the ramp. "I don't know." I realize I never asked his name, nor he mine. Somehow there didn't seem to be time or necessity for that. "He reminded me of Dad. And there was something else--a special joy, a glow about him."

Walking down the plane's narrow aisle between the rows of triple seats, I see my priest again, alone. Looking out a window, smiling to himself. Again that inner voice: "Sit next to him, you and Dick." But this time in the noisy commotion, I ignore it. We take the nearest seats. In that brief moment, it is as though I lose hold of an invisible string, and the balloon ascends and disappears. I am out of contact.

Forty minutes later, Flight 930 deplanes at luxurious Tampa Airport. I catch a brief glimpse of my priest friend, walking jauntily off the plane, luggage under one arm. He tips his hat and waves briefly.

Dick and I walk along a carpeted hallway toward the baggage station. Suddenly we see a crowd and we stop. Three uniformed medical emergency men kneel around a figure lying on the red carpet near the stairway. One gives artificial respiration while another takes out of a black bag his stethoscope and blood pressure apparatus. As my eyes focus on the center of attention I see the priest!

*Whatever
any of us
do, it's
important
work, big
or small.*

Guidance Outcome

Now he looks very different. His still-smiling face and balding head are blue. His clerical collar has been loosened

and his arms lie limp. His powerful hands, his healing hands, lie useless at his sides. Oxygen is brought and administered, artificial respiration goes on with dogged faithfulness. Outrage sweeps over me. This man loves life--why is a good, kind man cut down without choice in this impersonal building instead of among those he loved? Why is he denied at the end the solace and sacrament he had so often given others?"

Remembering how close he was to God dissolves my anger, turning it to awe. Awe that everyone in that small crowd of strangers rooted to the ground is equal, united by life's uncertainty and by God, who gives us life.

Confirmation

We stand there. The first-aid men check vital signs again, exchange glances, shake their heads, then stop their work. One hurries to a phone.

Most of the still silent crowd withdraw. A few of us remain. An airport official appears, asking, "Anyone here know this man?" Suddenly it sweeps over me. "Yes, I know him. Not his name, but our conversation was his last in this life." So I step up to the official as that guiding voice takes over once again. Memory provides me with essential details, details I would not have ordinarily stored or remembered, from that brief hour conversation. Even as I give identifying information of the little I know, I hear the distant wail of the ambulance siren outside the airport. "Come," Dick says gently, "We must get to the bus and go."

The Postlude

All this I tried to put in my letter to Mrs. Thompson, Father O'Brian's sister, whom I finally located through calling to the church where her brother served. Yet the story did not end there. To my delight, she wrote back, responding with

gratitude to my letter, relieved to know her brother had not died alone. "Thank you for being there and telling me about it. You were sent as an angel; I will not grieve anymore," she said. "He died a good death and was in peace."

The gift given me, a stranger, through this experience of God's guiding love continues to bless me and others. Like a pebble dropped in a pond circles out and enlarges, so this incident goes on. Almost accidentally I learned when I borrowed a book that a semi-retired friend, working at the nearby seminary library, had been Father O'Brian's friend of many years. When he heard of my airport encounter, he eagerly provided his own memories of his friend: mission service together in Central America, events of heroism, years of friendship.

The lasting impact Father O'Brian had on my life became clear as I began visiting my own mother and in-laws in nursing homes and others--strangers--who became part of what Quakers call "my bundle of concern."

"Listen to them," says a voice I recognize instantly. Each ill and elderly person has a story to tell. Reading aloud, running errands, writing notes for them are small services we can all render, but nothing compares to active listening and mostly prayers.

I believe in God's guidance and use of us as channels of God's love. That incident in a San Antonio airport remains an awesome reminder. It is a challenge to pray, then to listen to the voice of divine guidance and to follow this guidance in expectant trust.

The Lighted Hall of Joy

John L. Barber

Until very recently, I had not thought of myself as a creative person. Other people received inspirations--but not me. When I practiced law, other attorneys in our firm were the ingenious ones--not me, or so I thought. They could develop solutions to legal problems. Other people were creative, such as painters, musicians, sculptors, and actors--but not me. At least, this is what I believed. Practical, realistic, and down to earth were good descriptors of the person I was, but imaginative, creative and original were not. When God knit me together in my mother's womb, those qualities were left out in that process.

My self-perception, when combined with the lack of development of my imagination, created problems for me. It was difficult for me to practice prayers that required creating mental images of that which was not actually present.

In midlife, this perception of myself began to change. In fact, one of the true joys of this passage of life has been to discover that I was wrong. I am creative. I am imaginative.

In fact, once, while writing at our kitchen table, I almost cried in pondering the joy I had been given, by coming in touch with my creativity. One evening some time later, as

John L. Barber is an attorney, writer, husband, and father from North Carolina.

my wife Merry and I were reading, my thoughts wandered to writing. Turning to her, I said, "I feel so connected to myself when I write." In discovering my creative and imaginative self, I have experienced a wholeness and completeness that I had not felt before.

My developing fecundity would soon be of immense value to me, as I lost my job.

My time of unemployment, I believed, had been given to me by God so that I might discern my vocation. At the beginning of this time, I viewed this life transition as an outer work, one of finding what I was to do in the world.

As part of that process, I went on my first retreat. Now that I was unemployed, I had the luxury of time to withdraw to be with God as I had always longed to do.

However, as the week of the sanctuary time approached, I began to dread the experience. I feared that during my retreat, I would collapse into a state of profound depression and disintegrate into nothingness.

Leaving our home in Winston-Salem on that pre-dawn winter morning, I was in an excellent mood. However, as I reached the halfway point on my drive to Wernersville, my spirits began to sag. I had the sense that I was dying. Clinging to my rosary, I almost turned around and returned home. Despite the pain I felt, Someone or Something drew me on. I could not go back.

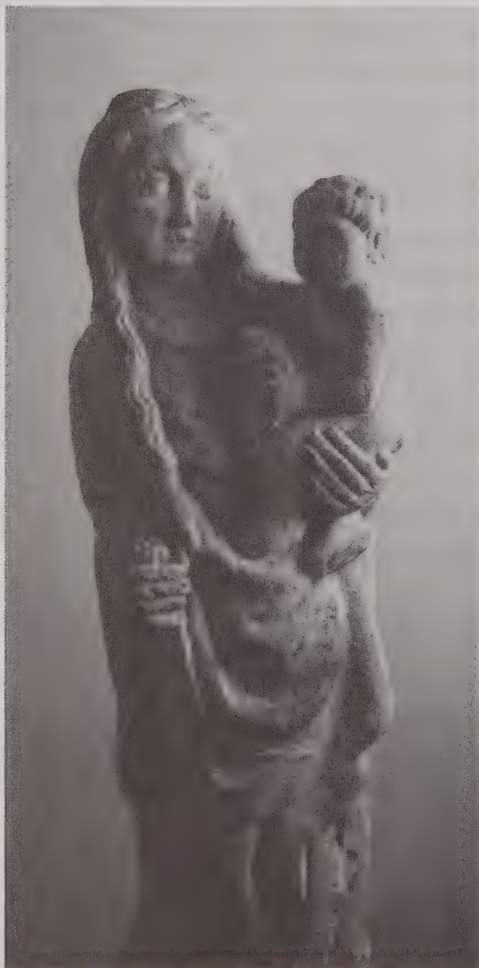
My first few days at the Jesuit Center, I tried to get a handle on what was stirring inside me. My director, Sister Barbara, attempted to help me. She explained that it took a great deal of courage to make the first retreat, particularly one that was a week long and silent. And yes, she said, a certain amount of fear of the unknown was normal in my situation. That helped me, but at the same time, it didn't help at all.

While she continued to listen patiently, I shared with her my resistance to the prayer that was being asked of me there.

As Mary Fahy wrote in her book *The Tree That Survived the Winter*, I sensed "that (I) might sink into that dark hole and lose" myself.

We hoped that the release of tears would be healing for me. One morning, while praying in a chair in front of a large crucifix, I wept. But crying did not alleviate that awful fear of dying. At Mass, the next day, I wept so hard that my body shook. Again the cleansing relief of tears did not relieve my sense of dissolving into a dark hole.

Paul Walsh



The gifted Sister Barbara, however, was very insightful. At our next morning session, she said to me, "John, ask Mary or one of your favorite saints to go with you in your prayer!" I responded to myself in my thoughts, "I guess Sister Barbara forgot that I'm not a Roman Catholic." Nonetheless, that evening after supper, as I went into the main chapel to pray, I found myself kneeling before a statue of Mary. I was asking the Mother of Jesus for her aid.

I imagined Mary praying with me. I

centered myself by concentrating on my breathing.

Thus, I needed a companion in prayer and in the retreat experience, one with whom I could be safe. For this time in his life, a scared, forty-nine-year-old little boy needed a divine mother.

The next morning I settled down for prayer in a chair in chapel. Without planning it or realizing exactly how it happened, I entered into the prayer of my imagination. Instead of struggling with my imagination, I was able to move easily into the adventure. There Mary and I walked on an elevator together and descended into my heart. Thus began the first of a series of three vivid prayers.

After the elevator descended and the door opened, we moved out down a long dark corridor. We walked through a number of past experiences until we came into my mother's womb. In the prayer, I saw my conception. Jesus knelt in the darkness of the womb to knit me together with the human gifts of my parents. I saw my birth. My mother's abdomen was opened (I had been born by a Cesarean section.) Looking out from her womb, I saw Jesus and Mary welcoming me to life. They told me: "Welcome. We're glad you're here. We're glad that you are born," they said. "We wanted you to be."

As Jesus examined my infant body, He said, "I know how many toes you have, how many cells are in your body and the number of hairs on your head. I know all about you."

That afternoon, I prayed again in the chapel. In the prayer of my imagination, I returned with Mary to the dark tunnel of my morning prayer. We traveled down the passageway until we came to a dark and earthy room. Standing by the door of the room was a dark figure whom I knew to be God. He held out His hands from which there came forth a light in the shape of a small bundle. That lighted bundle was my life. Returning then with Mary to my mother's womb, I saw God

hand the light to Jesus, who knelt in the womb with the bundle. Thus, my life was formed.

The next morning, on the next to the last day of my retreat, I prayed in my small room at the center. Once again I asked Mary to come with me down the elevator into my heart. We exited off the elevator down a long corridor, which at first was partially above ground allowing some light to shine in. Then the tunnel went completely below ground into total darkness, dropped steeply and turned sharply. Eventually, we arrived at a door where a Man stood with a light. Inside,

seated on a table, was a male figure of light. The Man told me that this lighted figure was the new me.

*Prayer is
not some-
thing we do
for God
as much
as it is
something
God does for
us.*

In this room was a second door, through which I could walk into a bright hall or corridor. I was told, however, that the old me would have to stay there in the room and die. Only the new me could walk through the door. This new me, He explained, would be more loving and more giving.

I protested that I didn't want to die.

The Man with the light said it wouldn't be a painful death and that I wouldn't really die--I would be new. "And besides," He said, "outside in the lighted hall there would be joy."

In this prayer of my imagination, I was given more than I could have ever expected--a road map for my journey and a vision of my destination--the lighted hall of joy. To help me face the terror which can be a part of the spiritual adventure, I was given a companion.

My experience revealed that the prayer of the imagination, like other spiritual disciplines, is more of a gift to us rather than something we should do. My encounters dem-

onstrate the ancient truth that prayer is not something that we do for God as much as it is something God does for us.



TRY THESE BIRTH TECHNIQUES!



Howard A. Hanger

If you had to give a one-phrase definition of Christmas, what would you say?

Jesus' birthday? . . . God so loved the world . . . ? Angels, shepherds, stables. and a baby? . . . Santa Claus and too much family?

What is Christmas to you?

Christmas is an old holiday, and over the years it's gathered a lot of baggage and embellishments. Its meaning gets spread pretty thin sometimes. But if Christmas is anything at all, it seems to me that it is about Giving Birth to Love.

That's what Mary did. And our faith is pretty clear that we are made to do the same thing . . . if we are indeed the image of God.

So how do you do that? How do you give birth to love? It's a great idea . . . sounds terrific in a song. It reads well in a greeting card. But how do you do that in real life?

I humbly suggest a few birthing techniques. They have been known to work before. I've tried a few myself. They're simple. But be careful doing them. They just might give birth to love in a very real way. And when that happens, watch out; because things will never be the same.

So here we go with love's birthing techniques:

Howard Hanger is Minister of Worship at Jubilee, a rapidly growing community known for its experimental and creative worship in Ashville, North Carolina.

- * Sing one of the following songs out loud when you first wake up: "O What a Beautiful Morning," "Zipedee Doodah" or "To Be Alive."
- * Say "I Love You" to someone you've never told it to before.
- * Read a book to a child.
- * Take a bunch of candy to a nursing home and give it all away.
- * Dance around the kitchen with your mate or lover.
- * Tell your favorite joke to everyone you meet during a day.
- * Roll around in leaves or snow, playing with a dog.
- * Smile for no apparent reason.
- * Call a long-lost friend and remind them of a happy time you shared together.
- * Write a "love letter" to someone who would least expect it--perhaps write it to yourself!
- * Hike to the crest of a hill with a friend, and sing together at the top of your lungs, "The Hills Are Alive With the Sound of Music."
- * Think of someone who might be lonely and invite them out for a late-night piece of pie and coffee.
- * Whistle "Let It Be Me" while you walk through a supermarket.
- * Offer to watch someone else's children so *they* can have a romantic night out--or at home.
- * Volunteer . . . at a soup kitchen, a hospital, a shelter for the homeless, a nursing home.

There are plenty more. Dream some up yourself. That little child called "Love" is just waiting to be born. Come on, all you Mary's. Give birth!

P R A Y E R S



Only Remember

Ruth Van Gorder

I shall not pray to God for you
for what I think you would
like to have, or ought to have,
of gain or grace or good;
or even for your current dream,
however absolute
lest time should prove we both had begged
for you a bitter fruit . . .
only remember you with love
without the least request;
and God, who loves you more than I,
will do for you what's best.

Ruth Van Gorder has had more than 1,800 poems published. She has raised four children, enjoys her twelve grandchildren, and takes pleasure in her garden and daily walks in her native Pennsylvania.

Prayer to Our Lady of “Yes”

Mary said to the angel, “I am the Lord’s servant! Let it happen as you have said.”

Luke 1:38

Edward P. Hogan

Our Lady who through your “yes” has changed the face of the world, take pity on those who wish to say yes always. You know the price this word costs and asks. Help us not to recoil in the face of the demands it makes on us. Teach us to say it like you in humility, purity, simplicity and abandonment to the will of the Father. Ask from your divine Son that the “yeses” we will make hereafter all the days of our life, will be an example of yours, to do once again more perfectly the will of God for our salvation and that of the whole world.



The Perfect Prayer

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

I look at Him, He looks at me,
this is the perfect prayer.

Edward Hogan has been a priest for more than fifty years and remains active in The Marriage Encounter Movement in Rockaway Point, New York.

A Christmas Prayer

Brother Thomas More, C.F.X.

May your hand be ever ready to extend
To someone yearning for an annealing touch.

May your ears be ever attentive to hear
Beneath the clamor of words
The cry of a troubled heart.

May your eyes be ever open to see
Beneath someone's calm surface
The undertow of unnamed fears.

May your tongue be ever blest with balm to sooth
The eyes of someone's blinding pain.

May your hand, your ears,
Your eyes, your tongue,
Become your body language
To proclaim that peace
Which on this day centuries ago
Was by the angels sung.

Thomas More Page is a Xaverian Brother in retirement in Louisville, KY. He was teacher, principal, administrator, and Executive Secretary of the Conference of Religious Superiors, as well as Director of Franciscan Renewal Center, Santa Barbara, CA.

P O E T R Y



Before An Annunciation

Patricia G. Rourke

Awareness creeping across the landscape of life:
shadows, impressions; more of spirit than of form;
wordless, sightless, but ever so powerful,
like the Angel Gabriel's wings strong for flight.
If I do not rush the message, it may find
a home in my body; some tongue, some voice,
some song, some word and life. The Creator
continually seeks ways to incarnate.

Patricia G. Rourke is a Catholic nun, clinical psychologist and works with people with life threatening illnesses. She has two books of poetry published, Letters From the Edge and What Continues.

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291 Witherspoon Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227
Phone: 609-924-6863
Fax: 609-924-6910
Website: <http://www.fip.org>

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Rebecca Laird

ART DIRECTOR
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